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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003161

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHEE, VROOMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2029
TAGS: [POL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION DATE TO BE FIXED FOR MARCH 6

REF: BAGHDAD 3157

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Despite assurances early on December 8 from advisors to the Presidency Council's members that elections would take place on February 27, Reuters reported late in the day that the date would instead be fixed for March 6. (Note: Under Iraqi law, the Presidency Council - President Talabani, VP Hashimi and VP al-Mehdi - is tasked with determining the election date after consulting with the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC). End note.) Nasser al-Ani, Chief of Staff for the Presidency Council, later confirmed to Deputy PolCouns that the elections would be held on March 6 and said a decision to that effect would be signed and announced on December 9, with letters to be sent to IHEC and the Council of Representatives (COR). When pressed on the reason for the change, he said February 27, the date proposed by UNAMI and initially agreed to by members of the Presidency Council and COR, had only been "a suggested date" and that more time was needed to "properly prepare" for the elections.

12. (C) Separately, contacts at UNAMI told Poloff that IHEC met with the Presidency Council on December 8 and advised its members they were ready to stage elections as early as February 24. IHEC commissioners told UNAMI that Hashimi pushed hard for February 27; however, Talabani and al-Mehdi insisted on March 6. The Presidency Council consulted PM Maliki, who supported March 6, ostensibly because it would give him more time to move security forces after the Ashura holiday. (Note: IHEC's Shi'a commissioners noted for UNAMI that Ashura would not in fact be over by March 6 and believed it offered a convenient pretext for moving the date to March 16. End note.) Talabani argued that snow in northern (i.e., Kurdish) regions could negatively impact voter turnout; the delay would help ensure fairer weather. (Comment: A dubious argument since provincial elections were held in January 2009 and national elections in December 2005. End comment.) Talabani and al-Mehdi also argued that the additional time would help facilitate out-of-country voting, a claim IHEC and UNAMI say is unsubstantiated by any technical reason. IHEC commissioners told UNAMI contacts it appeared the date of March 6 had been determined before their briefing to the Presidency Council.

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